

Griffith University, Gold Coast Campus

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Techno-literatures on the internet

Please read.

This text is constructed as a hyperlinked essay.

Reading the text on this page constitutes the essay.

Hypertext links are used in the same way as numbered references in a traditional essay except that instead of leading to a bibliography they link to a webliography.

It is suggested that the text is read before following any of the links.

The advent and accessibility of internet communication technology over recent years has seen the translation of many traditional literary print publications to the internet and the proliferation of new journals and other forms of electronic publishing like the e-zine or electronic magazine, which exists solely on the net without a print equivalent.

Sites dedicated to famous poets, and those not yet famous poets' own home pages, are increasing in number daily and showcase the texts of these individuals. This is providing a new and larger audience to poets worldwide and many Australian poets have established home pages to take advantage of the greater global exposure.

As well there are on-line magazines and sites which publish everything that is sent and also cater for participatory poetry from many contributors.

On-line home pages of poetry organisations and online poetry writing workshops provide a valuable resource for beginners and veterans alike. The internet also allows tertiary institutions formally teaching creative writing courses a forum for outlining those courses and presenting the work of their students.

There are many sites which just search the internet and find poetry sites which they then recommend through their links. These sites are performing a filtering, scrutinizing and reviewing role in the domain of techno-literature.

The internet provides a new means of publication and a new audience for poetry but it also has given rise to new kinds of techno-literature and to the means of performance of new forms of multimedia literature. A literature, a poetry has developed that can not be published in the traditional print medium. It represents a use of words that previous to high powered graphic computers and the multimedia capabilities of the internet, could not be conceived or achieved.

There are poetries on the internet which move with time and space, that jitter and jump, that appear in various layers of text revealed by the viewer and their mouse clicks, that jump via active links to other blocks of text of a site - poetries that defy linear progression, poetries made up of words but words not used in the same way as on a printed page.

These poetries use all the old literary devices of metaphor, rhyme, rhythm, allusion, alliteration, assonance, to create images, evoke emotions and tell stories, as well as new ones of colour of words, movement of words, spatial placement of words in a 3D environment, sounds, music, voices, images, video and scanned artifacts.

During my masters year, 1995, I created multimedia poetry on my computer for CD-rom production completely oblivious to the vast amounts of emerging techno-literatures throughout the world. I initially called them text animations. I was making dimocopo or digital moving concrete poetry but found that was not sufficient to describe exactly what I was producing as it

neglected the sound experiments I was doing with computer voices and sound manipulation software. I considered dimocoposo as an alternative but it was clumsy and still not accurate. When Richard Barbrook from the Hypermedia Research Centre emailed me and suggested that pomo was very 80's and Eduardo Kac, holographic/visual poet emailed and suggested what I was doing was different from concrete poetry anyway and should be called something new, I decided to give it a very generic name of cyberpoetry.

I had created a poetry that could not be published in a print publication but could only be experienced via a computer and CD-rom.

In 1996 I was keen to see if anyone anywhere else in the world was doing this kind of work? Since the kind of literature I was looking for could not be published in print it was useless to go to the traditional literary sources to find out about cyberpoetry. I began to search the internet for cyberpoetry/techno-literatures.

I established a web site of my own and began gathering the internet addresses of cyberpoetry sites which I compiled into a cyberpoetry gallery.

It was a fortunate time to begin such a search as the internet had not only recently become graphical but was entering its multimedia phase, and I had the luxury of a ten week residency at QUT's Centre for Innovation and the Arts to experiment with software, internet browsers, design, audio, video, content development and creation for the new medium, the internet, which had its own rules and restrictions to consider.

After a year searching the net, making contact with other cyberpoets and swapping links with other sites it seems to me that the new forms of techno-literature fall into seven categories.

The first category, which takes advantage of the hyperlinking abilities of the internet, is hypertext poetry.

The earliest of this kind of poetry and fiction originated as Mac hypercard stacks, and then progressed to html on the internet. Canadian David Rockey's 'liquid language' first appeared as a hypercard stack in 1989, and is still available for download from his website.

George Landow has been a major hypertext theorist on the net, and in print, and describes the non-linear hypertext literature as linking between blocks of text or *lexias* an expression first coined by Roland Barthes to describe the way literature works. Hypertexts can be contained within a set number of documents to link between or open webs which link out to other documents on the internet. At the Brown University website all kinds of examples of hypertext can be found as well as an archive of past webs/hypertexts.

There are many practitioners of hypertext literature, like Michael Joyce in the U.S.A. and John Cayley in the U.K. Also Martin Auer, the place, and Mark Amerika's grammatron, just to name a few.

Another interesting practitioner using java codes and layers of text is Stuart Moulthrop at the University of Baltimore; whilst in Australia, Spinifex Press has pioneered an interesting concept, The Building of Babel Site, which is an interactive final chapter to a published book. (Editorial note).

The second category of cyberpoetry also utilises the hyperlinking feature of the internet but links are not always text. Image, sound, video and animation are linked to or used as links to blocks of text. This is known as hypermedia poetry. Very good individual sites exist on the web but three good galleries are the Electronic Poetry Centre, Machine Made of Words, and the work of the students of the Hypermedia Research Centre in Westminster headed by Richard Barbrook.

Simon Pockley, an RMIT masters student, recently won an internet award for his hypermedia journey site called Flight of Ducks.

The third category of poetry that cannot be published in print is the random poetry generator. This involves software programs that generate poems to a formula, e.g. Martin Auer's Poetry Machine, a very sexy haiku generator, or perhaps some surrealist generators.

The fourth category, is sound manipulation poetry. Oral poetry has been around since before written poetry, but sound manipulation and sound as meaning, sound as emotional journey, even sound-as-noise and noise-as-sound type poetry grew from the revolutionary arts movements of the early 1900's in Europe and the mid 1900's in the U.S.A. A very comprehensive site for contemporary and traditional sound poetry can be found at the ubuweb site maintained by Kennyg, and in Australia by John Reeves.

Apple's text to speech technology plus a plugin called *talker* have allowed a new kind of experimentation with computer voices. Hello, my name is Victoria is an example of a poem that reads itself when you arrive at the page (if you have a mac that is!). The talker plugin page has many more examples, and so do I on my site.

The fifth category of cyberpoem is an old form too, that of spoken word poetry, as it is known in the U.S.A., or performance poetry in Australia and the U.K. The internet provides a means of publication for this artform alongside text and image. Bob Holman, of Nuyorican Poets Cafe fame, has an excellent site called mouth almighty and is responsible for world wide word, a resource site for spoken word poetry. On-line archives of people like Jack Kerouac reading his poetry exist on the net; like the previously mentioned ubuweb, these sites document past spoken word artists.

Contemporary spoken word performers like Henry Rollins and John Cooper Clarke (U.K.) are also represented on the web.

A new form of performance has happened also over the internet with sites like the telepoetics site which uses teleconferencing software to broadcast live performances in different physical locations around the world. And there is even a Brisbane site for telepoetics.

New forms of visual poetry, make up **the sixth category** of cyberpoem. Poems which are 3D holograms (holopoetry) are being produced by Brazilian Eduardo Kac. I have attempted to create 3D stereogram poetry, and there are many more experimental visual poetry sites, some approaching the artform from a visual arts perspective and some from a literary perspective.

In Australia the tableau group or Electronic Writing Ensemble of South Australia has an excellent gallery of work. There are also Spanish sites, Argentinian sites, German sites, in fact sites which feature visual poets from all over the globe, like the wr-eye-tings scratchpad and grist on-line.

The seventh category of cyberpoem is the animated text type cyberpoem and many examples can be found at my site and at Janan Platt's site, the machine made of words site. Animation of text is being accomplished with java, animated gif, shockwave, quicktime and even fancy html scripting like paz's site. The birdhouse artists collective is a good site for htmlart as they call it.

While I have tried to identify the kinds of categories that techno-literatures fall into, there are obviously cross-overs between the categories. One thing is for sure, these categories of techno-literature did not exist prior to the internet and multimedia computer. Writers of techno-literature no longer conceive of words on a two dimensional surface, in lines across a page, but rather words in a space, a three dimensional cyberspace, in which text moves around, to tell a story, evoke emotions and create imagery.

Komninos Zervos has recently been short listed for the Australian Teachers of Media Awards in the category Most Innovative/Creative Web Site. He is a cyberpoet who teaches writing at Griffith University, Gold Coast Campus.

Notes and Debate

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